

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 22 May 2025 at 9.30 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin (substitute) (remote)
Mr C Ballance
Mr S Coghill (remote)
Ms T Collier (remote)
Mr L Fraser
Mr A Graham
Mr R Gunn
Mrs J Hendry (remote)

Mrs B Jarvie (remote)
Ms M MacCallum
Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Ms K MacLean
Mr D Millar
Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Mr M Reiss

Non-Members also present:

Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Mr R MacKintosh
Mr T MacLennan (remote)

Mr D McDonald
Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mrs M Ross (remote)

In attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead - Waste Strategy and Operations
Ms D Sutton, Strategic Lead – Community Operations and Logistics
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead – Finance (remote)
Ms E Barrie, Head of HR
Ms H Ross, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms H Jones, HR Business Partner
Mr A Hunter, Service Lead – Transport and Logistics
Ms C Butler, Equalities and Inequalities Officer
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr M Humphreys, Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr B Barnwell, International Commando Heritage Trust
Mr P Wilson, International Commando Heritage Trust
Mr D Burnett, International Commando Heritage Trust
Mr A Sykes, International Commando Heritage Trust

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

Business

1. **Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence** **Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr M Green and Mr S Mackie.

2. **Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement** **Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd**

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. **Good News** **Naidheachdan Matha**

The Chair informed the Committee of the following items of good news:-

- Whin Park in Inverness had successfully reopened following a £500k refurbishment, completed on time and within budget. The park had been very popular since reopening, and the official opening ceremony was scheduled for Friday, 30th May;
- ILM Highland, in partnership with Highland Council, had launched a new monthly Household Electrical Recycling Collection Service for rural communities. Covering areas with limited access to recycling centres, the service helped residents recycle unwanted electrical items. Funded through the Scottish Government's Recycling Improvement Fund, the initiative included a new van operated by ILM Highland to support increased reuse and recycling;
- congratulations were extended to Juliana Teixeira and Prameela Middleton from the Environmental Health team, who had passed their exams in March to become fully qualified Food Safety Officers, and to Claire Lyall and Carol Littlewood on passing their registration exams in March. Following completion of an intensive study programme they had become fully qualified Registrars;
- extensions to Croy and Duror Cemeteries had been completed, providing 92 and 140 new lairs respectively, adding over 30 years of capacity. Bereavement Services had also enhanced memorial options at Inverness Crematorium, with the Book of Remembrance becoming available online from May 2025 to improve accessibility for families and the public;
- congratulations were extended to Annemarie MacAlpine, Operations Manager for the Customer and Registration Service, who had been appointed President of the Association of Registrars of Scotland for a two-year term. The Association represented Registration staff across Scotland and worked with National Records of Scotland and the Scottish Government; and
- the Amenities team had been shortlisted for a Silver APSE Award in the *Striving for Excellence* category, recognising their work in establishing the in-house play team. Since its formation, the team had partnered with over 50 community groups, refurbished 27 play areas, and developed the Play Park Strategy and action plan. They had been interviewed for the Gold Award and the winner would be announced at the annual dinner.

The Committee **NOTED** the Good News.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Highland Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba airson na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Highland Performance Report for Quarters 3 and 4 2024/25.

In introducing the report, the Local Senior Officer explained that this would be his last meeting of the Communities and Place Committee as he was transferring to a new national role. The new Local Senior Officer for Highland would be Lynne Gow.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the work done to control the fire in Culbin Forest near Nairn, and it was clarified that the cause of the fire could not be commented on as an investigation was ongoing;
- home fire safety visits and visits to tenant groups were welcomed;
- the success of fire skills days for young people was commended, and it was suggested these could encourage more young people to join the SFRS;
- the success of sharing crews between stations in Skye was highlighted, and an update was sought, and provided, on the progress of a new Portree Fire Station;
- concerns were raised that the SFRS was not a statutory consultee on planning applications for Battery Energy Storage Systems, that the figures given for the amount of water needed to suppress fires at such facilities may not be accurate for those in remote areas; and that local fire crews would be unable to deal with a fire at a large facility;
- thanks were extended for the work done to deal with a bad moorland fire near Thurso;
- information was sought, and provided, on the area covered by Inverness Fire Station and how it interfaced with retained stations;
- it was suggested that the core strategic priority in Highland should be availability in remote and rural areas, and information was sought, and provided, on what could be done to increase availability in remote areas such as Bettyhill, Tongue, Lochinver, Scourie, Bonar Bridge and Cannich;
- on the point being raised, it was explained that a breakdown of road traffic accidents by road would be addressed at Area Committees;
- the increase in pay and introduction of more flexible hours for retained firefighters was welcomed; and
- the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, extended best wishes to the Local Senior Officer for Highland in his new role. Appreciation was expressed for the partnership approach that had been taken during his time in post, and for the regular Members' briefings. Members looked forward to meeting his successor.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the report.

5. Equalities Mainstreaming and Outcomes Report 2025 Aithisg Bhuilean Co-ionannachd agus Àbhaisteachaidh

There had been circulated Report No CP/6/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the importance of the report was emphasised, and it was suggested that, in future, it should be taken to the Full Council. The Chief Officer - Housing and Communities undertook to raise this at the next review of the Scheme of Delegation;
- it was highlighted that the new prison in Inverness did not have any facilities for women, and it was queried whether it was possible to embed Equalities Impact Assessments into the planning applications process at an early stage. The Chief Officer - Housing and Communities undertook to discuss the matter with planning officers;
- while flexible and hybrid working was helping women to work around their caring responsibilities, it was suggested this could hinder women from achieving more senior positions, and it was questioned whether the Council was thinking radically enough in terms of potential solutions;
- information was sought, and provided, on the child friendly complaints process, and the Senior Community Development Manager undertook to share the detail with Councillor S Atkin;
- the neurodiversity outcome was welcomed, and attention was drawn to the neurodiversity awareness training received by Housing staff;
- a Members' briefing was requested on the steps being taken to improve living standards for the Gypsy Traveller community. The Chair confirmed this would be arranged;
- it was highlighted that only 15% of staff had responded to the staff survey, and information was sought, and provided, on how to improve engagement;
- the reduction in the gender pay gap was welcomed, although it was unacceptable that it still existed, and it was suggested it needed to be made a priority;
- in response to questions, the Senior Community Development Manager undertook to provide Councillor M MacCallum with further information on the inclusion of verbal violence in the Equally Safe at Work pilot, whether sexism was included in equality and diversity training and the school bullying survey, and the timeframe for collecting data on maternity and pregnancy; and
- the Chair and Committee Members extended their thanks and congratulations to Senior Community Development Manager, Helen Ross, on her retirement. Helen had worked for Highland Council since 1998, in a number of roles in both Housing and Ward Management, and would be greatly missed by colleagues and Members.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the Outcome and Mainstreaming Progress Report for the Highland Council covering the period 2023 – 2025 (and incorporating the Education Authority and Licensing Board) as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report;
- AGREED** a revised set of Equality Outcomes for the Council for the period 2025 – 2029 as detailed in section 8 of the report; and
- AGREED** that a Members' briefing be organised on improving living standards for Gypsy Travellers.

6. Environmental Health Performance 24/25 and Operational Plan 25/26 Cunntas às Ùr mu Ghnìomhan Slàinte Àrainneachdail

There had been circulated Report No CP/7/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- appreciation was expressed for the range and volume of services carried out by the Environmental Health team;
- concern was expressed regarding the increase in dog attacks across Scotland and information was sought, and provided, concerning engagement with the Scottish Government on dog control and whether the current legislation was considered to be sufficiently clear and robust;
- the problem of abandoned vehicles was highlighted, with particular reference to abandoned boats, caravans and trailers. It was confirmed that guidance would be produced on dealing with abandoned boats and the Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to keep Members updated on progress;
- concern was expressed about infestations of rats in residential buildings and, on the point being raised, the Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to clarify with housing colleagues where the responsibility for pest control lay in relation to Council houses;
- information was sought, and provided, on shellfish monitoring and problems caused by seagulls;
- work with schools on air quality was welcomed and it was hoped this would continue;
- the focus on food safety and private water supplies was welcomed; and
- it was welcomed that grass cutting would be carried out around housing estates as this would help to reduce the tick population.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the Environmental Health performance in 24/25 to date including delivering statutory duties to over 6000 properties on private water supplies, over 5000 food businesses, and receiving over 13,500 service requests on a wide range of public health, nuisance, licensing, safety, dog control, animal health and incivility issues; and
- APPROVED** the Environmental Health Operational Plan to 31 March 2026 as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

7. Fleet Traffic Commissioner Response Freagairt Coimiseanair Trafaig a' Chabhlaich

There had been circulated Report No CP/8/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Thanks having been extended to staff for their hard work in preventing a possible public inquiry, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- the action plan as supplied to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland; and
- the progress to date on implementing the action plan.

8. Service Workforce Plan Annual Progress Report Aithisg Dealbhadh Feachd-obrach

There had been circulated Report No CP/9/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the steps being taken to attract more young people to work for the Council, managing an aging workforce, and what could be done to take care of employees' physical health in order to reduce staff absences; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Play team had increased from three to six members of staff. Progress on some playpark improvements had been delayed due to the availability of equipment from suppliers, and the Strategic Lead - Community Operations and Logistics undertook to liaise with suppliers in that regard.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Communities and Place workforce planning progress report and updated action plan; and
- ii. the positive outcomes from the report, including:-
 - a. team redesigns and restructures had improved efficiency, service delivery and supported staff development opportunities within the service; and
 - b. specific training commitments had been given to areas such as Environmental Health and Fleet.

9. Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) - Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Phlana Leasachadh Bhuilean na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No CP/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the HOIP Delivery Plan and Performance Framework which could be found at Appendices 1 and 2 of the report;
- ii. the progress update against the HOIP Delivery Plan; and
- iii. that the annual progress update on the HOIP would be considered at the Council meeting in October.

10. Service Performance Reporting for Q4 January 2025 to March 2025
Aithisg Coileanadh Seirbheis R4 Faoilleach – Màrt 2025

There had been circulated Report No CP/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance information.

11. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Update Q4 2024/25 - Person Centred Solutions Portfolio – Capacity Building – Community Led Service Delivery
Cunntas às Ùr mun Phlana Lìbhrigidh

There had been circulated Report No CP/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the work of the employability team was commended, and it was queried what role Local Members could play in terms of referring young people. The Chief Officer – Housing and Communities undertook to raise this with the employability team and update Members;
- reference was made to volunteer fatigue, and it was questioned how more people could be encouraged to volunteer. In response to a request, the Chief Officer – Housing and Communities confirmed that an update on community volunteering in Skye could be provided at a Ward Business Meeting; and
- further information was requested on community-led service delivery, how it would work in specific areas, such as the west of Inverness, and what the project costs of £1.2m would cover. A request having been made for a Members' briefing, it was confirmed this could be provided either to all Members or at a local level.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the report, including progress to date and next steps.

12. Minutes of Waste Strategy Working Group **Geàrr-chunntas de Bhuidheann-obrach na Ro-innleachd Sgudail**

There had been circulated, and were **APPROVED**, the Minutes of the meeting of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 28 April 2025.

13. Membership of Waste Strategy Working Group **Ballrachd de Bhuidheann-obrach na Ro-innleachd Sgudail**

The Committee **AGREED** the following changes to the membership of the Waste Strategy Working Group:-

- Mr S Coghill to replace Ms M Smith
- Mr C Ballance to replace Mr A Baldrey

14. Presentation: International Commando Heritage Trust **Taisbeanadh: Urras Dualchais nan Comandothan Eadar-nàiseanta**

Mr B Barnwell and Mr P Wilson of the International Commando Heritage Trust gave a presentation providing an overview of the Trust's mission and aspirations ahead of the charity's formal launch at Achnacarry, Spean Bridge, in June 2025.

During discussion, thanks were expressed for the presentation, and support was expressed for the project. The importance of preserving and educating people about local history was emphasised, and it was suggested that the details of the project be shared with the Town Twinning Association. It was also requested that the Trust's Mission Statement be circulated to all Members.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

The meeting concluded at 12.45 pm.